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A DEER HUNT IN A "DUG-OUT."

THE long-tailed deer, one of the smallest of the deer kind, is found principally in wooded countries; but its favorite haunts are not in the heavy timber of the great forests, but in the park-like openings that occur in many parts of the Rocky Mountain valleys. Sometimes whole tracts of country are met with in these regions whose surface exhibits a pleasing variety of woodland and prairie; sloping hills appear with coppices upon their crests and along their sides. Among these natural groves may be seen troops of the long-tailed deer, browsing along the declivities of the hills, and, by their elegant attitudes and graceful movements, adding to the beauty of the landscape.

Some years ago I had an opportunity of hunting the long-tailed deer. I was on my way across the Rocky Mountains to Fort Vancouver, when circumstances rendered it necessary that I should stop for some days at a small trading-post on one of the branches of the Columbia. I was, in fact, detained, waiting for a party of fur-traders with whom I was to travel, and who required some time to get their packs in readiness. The trading-post was a small place, with miserable accommodations, having scarcely room enough in its two or three wretched log-cabins to lodge half the company that happened at the time to claim its hospitality. As my business was simply to wait for my traveling companions I was of course *ennuyé* almost to death in such a place; and it was not long before I began to meditate a hunting expedition. My servant Dick, a *bois brulé*, or half-breed, and a first-rate hunter, suggested an idea which seemed to promise plenty of sport and venison,—a hunt to take place by night. I readily gave my consent, as I saw in the proposal the chances of enjoying a very rare sport. It was to be a fire-hunt; but not as usually practiced among backwoodsmen, by carrying a torch through the woods. Our torch was to float upon the water, while we were snugly seated beside it; in other words, we would carry our torch in a canoe, and, floating down stream, would shoot the deer that happened to be upon the banks drinking or cooling their hoofs in the water. I had heard of the plan, but had never practiced it, although I was desirous of so doing. Dick had often killed deer in this way, and therefore knew all about it. It was agreed, then, that we should try the experiment.

During the next day Dick and I proceeded in our preparations without saying anything to any one. It was our design to keep our night-hunt a secret, lest we might be unsuccessful, and get laughed at for our pains. On the other hand, should we succeed in killing a goodly number of long-tails, it would be time enough to let it be known how we had managed matters. We had little difficulty in keeping our designs to ourselves. Every one was busy with his own affairs, and took no heed of our maneuvers. Our chief difficulty lay in procuring a boat; but for the consideration of a few loads of powder, we at length borrowed an old canoe that belonged to one of the Flathead Indians—a sort of hanger-on of the post. This craft was simply a log of the cotton-wood, (*Populus candicans*,) rudely hollowed out by means of an ax, and slightly rounded at the ends to produce the canoe-shape. It was that species of water-craft popularly known throughout Western America as a "dug-out," a phrase which explains itself. It was both old and rickety, but, after a short inspection, Blue Dick declared it would do "fust-rate."

Our next move was to prepare our torch. For this we had to make an excursion to the neighboring hills, where we found the very material we wanted—the dry knots of the pitch pine-tree (*Pinus rigida*.) A large segment of birch-bark was then sought for and obtained, and our implements were complete. At twilight all was ready, and, stepping into our dug-out, we paddled silently down stream. As soon as we had got out of the neighborhood of the post we lighted our torch. This was placed in a large fryingpan out upon the bow, and was in reality rather a fire of pine-knots than a torch. It blazed up brightly, throwing a glare over the surface of the stream, and reflecting in red light every object upon both banks. We, on the other hand, were completely hidden from view by means of the birch-bark screen, which stood up between us and the torch.

As soon as we were fairly under way, I yielded up the paddle to Dick, who now assigned to himself the double office of guiding the dug-out and keeping the torch

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trimmed. I was to look to the shooting; so placing my trusty rifle across my thighs, I sat alternately scanning both banks as we glided along. I shall never forget the romantic effect which was produced upon my mind during that wild excursion. The scenery of the river upon which we had launched our craft was at all times of a picturesque character. Under the blaze of the pine-wood—its trees and rocks tinted with a vermilion hue, while the rippling flood below ran like molten gold—the effect was heightened to a degree of sublimity which could not have failed to impress the dullest imagination. It was the autumn season, too, and the foliage, which had not yet commenced falling, had assumed those rich varied tints so characteristic of the American *sylva*—various hues of green and golden, and yellow and deep red, were exhibited upon the luxuriant frondage that lined the banks of the stream, and here and there drooped like embroidered curtains down to the water's edge. It was a scene of that wild beauty, that picturesque sublimity, which carries one to the contemplation of its Creator.

"Yonder!" muttered a voice that roused me from my reverie. It was Dick who spoke; and, in the dark shadow of the birch-bark, I could see one of his arms extended and pointing to the right bank. My eyes followed the direction indicated: they soon rested upon two small objects, that from the darker background of the foliage appeared bright and luminous. These objects were round, and close to each other; and at a glance I knew them to be the eyes of some animal, reflecting the light of our torch. My companion whispered me that they were the eyes of a deer. I took sight with my rifle, aiming as nearly as I could midway between the luminous spots. I pulled trigger, and my true piece cracked like a whip. The report was not loud enough to drown the noises that came back from the shore. There was a rustling of leaves, followed by a plunge, as of somebody falling in the water. Dick turned the head of the dug-out, and paddled her up to the bank. The torch, blazing brightly, lit up the scene ahead of us, and our eyes were gratified by the sight of a fine buck, that had fallen dead into the river. He was about being drawn into the eddy of the current; but Dick prevented this, and, seizing him by the antlers, soon deposited him safely in the bottom of the dug-out.

Our craft was once more headed down stream, and we scrutinized every winding of the banks in search of another pair of gleaming eyes. In less than half an hour these appeared, and we succeeded in killing a second long-tail—a doe—and dragged her also into the boat. Shortly after, a third was knocked over, which we found standing out in the river upon a small point of sand. This proved to be a young spike-buck, his horns not having as yet branched off into antlers. About a quarter of a mile further down a fourth deer was shot at, and missed, the dug-out having grazed suddenly against a rock just as I was pulling trigger, thus rendering my aim unsteady.

I need hardly say that this sport was extremely exciting; and we had got many miles from the post, without thinking either of the distance or the fact that we should be under the disagreeable necessity of paddling the old Flathead's canoe every inch of the way back again. Down stream it was all plain sailing; and Dick's duty was light enough, as it consisted merely in keeping the dug-out head foremost in the middle of the river. The current ran at the rate of three miles an hour, and therefore drifted us along with sufficient rapidity.

The first thing that suggested a return to either of us was the fact that our pine-knots had run out: Dick had just piled the last of them in the fryingpan. At this moment a noise sounded in our ears that caused us some feelings of alarm: it was the noise of falling water. It was not new to us, for, since leaving the post, we had passed the mouths of several small streams that debouched into the one upon which we were, in most cases over a jumble of rocks, thus forming a series of noisy rapids. But that which we now heard was directly ahead of us, and must, thought we, be a rapid or fall of the stream itself; moreover, it appeared louder than any we had hitherto passed.

We lost but little time in conjectures. The first impulse of my companion, upon catching the sound, was to stop the progress of the dug-out, which in a few seconds he succeeded in doing; but by this time our torch had shown us that there was a sharp turning in the river, with a long reach of smooth water below. The

cascade, therefore, could not be in our stream, but in some tributary that fell into it near the bend. On seeing this, Dick turned his paddle, and permitted the dug-out once more to float with the current. The next moment we passed the mouth of a good-sized creek, whose waters, having just leaped a fall of several feet, ran into the river, covered with white froth and bubbles. We could see the fall at a little distance through the branches of the trees; and, as we swept on, its foaming sheet reflected the light of our torch like shining metal.

We had scarcely passed this point when my attention was attracted by a pair of fiery orbs that glistened out of some low bushes upon the left bank of the river. I saw that they were the eyes of some animal, but what kind of animal I could not guess. I knew they were not the eyes of a deer. Their peculiar scintillation, their lesser size, the wide space between them—all convinced me they were not deer's eyes. Moreover, they moved at times as if the head of the animal was carried about in irregular circles. This is never the case with the eyes of the deer, which either pass hurriedly from point to point, or remain with a fixed and steadfast gaze. I knew, therefore, it was no deer; but no matter what: it was some wild creature, and all are alike the game of the prairie-hunter. I took aim, and pulled trigger. While doing so I heard the voice of my companion warning me, as I thought, not to fire. I wondered at this admonition, but it was then too late to heed it, for it had been uttered almost simultaneously with the report of my rifle.

I first looked to the bank to witness the effect of my shot. To my great surprise, the eyes were still there, gleaming from the bushes as brightly as ever! Had I missed my aim? It is true the voice of my companion had somewhat disconcerted me; but I still believed that my bullet must have sped truly, as it had been delivered with a good aim. As I turned to Dick for an explanation, a new sound fell upon my ears that explained all, at the same time causing me no slight feeling of alarm. It was a sound not unlike that sometimes uttered by terrified swine, but still louder and more threatening. I knew it well—I knew it was the snort of the grizzly bear.

Of all American animals the grizzly bear is the most to be dreaded. Armed or unarmed, man is no match for him, and even the courageous hunter of these parts shuns the encounter. This was why my companion had admonished me not to fire. I thought I had missed: it was not so. My bullet had hit and stung the fierce brute to madness; and a quick cracking among the bushes was immediately followed by a heavy plunge: the bear was in the water.

"Good heavens, he's after us!" cried Dick in accents of alarm, at the same time propelling the dug-out with all his might. It proved true enough that the bear was after us, and the very first plunge had brought his nose almost up to the side of the canoe. However, a few well-directed strokes of the paddle set us in quick motion, and we were soon gliding rapidly down stream, followed by the enraged animal, that every now and then uttered one of his fierce snorts.

What rendered our situation a terrible one was, that we could not now see the bear, nor tell how far he might be from us. All to the rear of the canoe was of a pitchy darkness in consequence of the screen of birch-bark. No object could be distinguished in that direction, and it was only by hearing him that we could tell he was still some yards off. The snorts, however, were more or less distinct, as heard amid the varying roar of the waterfall; and sometimes they seemed as if the snout from which they proceeded was close up to our stern. We knew that if he once laid his paw upon the canoe, we should either be sunk or compelled to leap out and swim for it. We knew, moreover, that such an event would be certain death to one of us at least. I need hardly affirm that my companion used his paddle with all the energy of despair. I assisted him as much as was in my power with the but-end of my gun, which was empty: on account of the hurry and darkness I had not attempted to reload it.

We had shot down stream for a hundred yards or so, and were about congratulating ourselves on the prospect of an escape from the bear, when a new object of dread presented itself to our terrified imaginations. This object was the sound of falling water; but not as before, coming from some tributary stream. No. It was a fall of the river upon which we

were floating, and evidently only a very short distance below us! We were, in fact, within less than one hundred yards of it. Our excitement in consequence of being pursued by the bear, as well as the fact that the sough of the cascade above still filled our ears, had prevented us from perceiving this new danger until we had approached it.

A shout of terror and warning from my companion seemed the echo of one I had myself uttered. Both of us understood the peril of our situation, and both, without speaking another word, set about attempting to stop the boat. We paddled with all our strength—he with the oar, while I used the flat butt of my rifle. We had succeeded in bringing her to a sort of equilibrium, and were in hopes of being able to force her toward the bank, when all at once we heard a heavy object strike against the stern. At the same moment the bow rose up into the air, and a number of the burning pine-knots fell back into the bottom of the canoe. They still continued to blaze; and their light now falling toward the stern, showed us a fearful object. The bear had seized hold of the dug-out, and his fierce head and long curving claws were visible over the edge. Although the little craft danced about upon the water, and was likely to be turned keel upward, the animal showed no intention of relaxing its hold; but, on the contrary, seemed every moment mounting higher into the canoe.

Our peril was now extreme. We knew it, and the knowledge half paralyzed us. Both of us had started up, and for some moments half-sat, half-crouched, uncertain how to act. Should we use the paddles, and get the canoe ashore, it would only be to throw ourselves into the jaws of the bear. On the other hand, we could not remain as we were, for in a few seconds we should be drifted over the falls; and how high these were we knew not. We had never heard of them: they might be fifty feet—they might be a hundred. High enough they were, no doubt, to precipitate us into eternity. The prospect was appalling, and our thoughts ran rapidly. Quick action was required. I could think of no other than to lean sternward, and strike at the bear with my clubbed rifle. At the same time I called upon my companion to paddle for the shore. We preferred, under all circumstances, risking the chances of a land-encounter with our grizzly antagonist.

I had succeeded in keeping the bear out of the canoe by several well-planted blows upon the snout; and Dick was equally successful in forcing the dug-out nearer to the bank, when a sharp crack reached my ears, followed by a terrified cry from my companion. I glanced suddenly round to ascertain the cause of these demonstrations. Dick held in his hands a short round stick, which I recognized as the shaft of the paddle. The blade had snapped off, and was floating away on the surface.

We were now helpless. The *manége* of the canoe was no longer possible. Over the falls she must go! We thought of leaping out, but it was too late. We were almost upon the edge, and the black current that bore our craft along would have carried our bodies with like velocity. We could not make a dozen strokes before we should be swept to the brink; it was too late. We both saw this; and each knew the feelings of the other, for we felt alike. Neither spoke; but, crouching down and holding the gunwales of the canoe, we awaited the awful moment. The bear seemed to have some apprehension as well; for, instead of continuing his endeavors to climb into the canoe, he contented himself with holding fast to the stern, evidently under some alarm. The torch still blazed, and the canoe was catching fire; perhaps this it was that alarmed the bear. The last circumstance gave us at the moment but little concern; the greater danger eclipsed the less. We had hardly noticed it when we felt that we were going over. The canoe shot outward as if propelled by some projectile force; then came a loud crash, as though we had dropped upon a hard rock. Water, and spray, and froth were dashed over our bodies; and the next moment, to our surprise as well as delight, we felt ourselves still alive, and seated in the canoe, which was floating gently in still smooth water. It was quite dark, for the torch had been extinguished; but even in the darkness we could perceive the bear swimming and floundering near the boat. To our great satisfaction, we saw him heading for the shore, and widening the distance between himself and us with all the haste he could make. The unexpected precipitation over the falls had cooled his courage, if not his hostility.

Dick and I headed the canoe, now half full of water, for the opposite bank, which we contrived to reach by using the rifle and our hands for paddles. Here we made the little vessel fast to a tree, intending to leave it there, as we could not by any possibility get it back over the fall. Having hung our game out of reach of the wolves, we turned our faces up stream, and, after a long and wearisome walk, succeeded in getting back to the post. Next morning a party went down for the venison with the intention also of carrying the canoe back over the fall. The craft, however, was found to be so much injured that it would not hang together during the portage, and was therefore abandoned. This was no pleasant matter to me, for it afterward cost me a considerable sum before I could square with the old Flathead for his worthless dug-out.